

Ellen Ochoa, Astronaut



I tell students that the opportunities I had were a result of having a good educational background. Education is what allows you to stand out.

1 Ellen was just one of millions of Americans who sat in front of their television sets to watch *Apollo 11* land on the moon. She listened to Neil Armstrong say, "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind." It was exciting to see history being made, and it inspired many children to become astronauts. Ellen, who was just 11 years old at the time, didn't think much about becoming an astronaut because astronauts were men. She had no idea at the time that she would become the first Hispanic American woman to go to space.

2 Ellen was born on May 10, 1958 in Los Angeles. She was the middle child of five children. Education was important to Ellen's mother and she expected all her children to excel in school. She set an example for her children by working and going to college at the same time. It took Ellen's mother 22 years to earn her college degree. But Ellen learned an important lesson about setting a goal and sticking to it until you achieved it.

3 Ellen was a well-rounded student. She loved playing the flute. But she also enjoyed her math and science classes. She excelled in high school and graduated as the valedictorian of her class. A valedictorian is the student who graduates with the highest grade point average. Ellen was offered a 4-year scholarship to Stanford University, but she turned it down because she wanted to live close to her two younger brothers. Instead, she went to San Diego State University.

4 Ellen was not sure what she wanted to study and major in at college. She enjoyed playing the flute so she thought about majoring in music. She also thought she might want to major in business. She still enjoyed math and science and thought about majoring in engineering, but her college professors (the teachers) discouraged her. They

told Ellen that girls did not major in engineering. So Ellen decided to major in physics. She worked hard in college and once again was the valedictorian of her graduating class.

5 Being an engineer was still a dream for Ellen and this time she was not going to be discouraged. She headed to Stanford University to study electrical engineering. Ellen earned both a master's degree and a PhD in electrical engineering in 1985.

6 Times were changing and women were now able to to be astronauts for NASA, so Ellen applied to NASA in 1985. She was not accepted to the program that year, and so she decided to work in electrical engineering research. Ellen focused her research on optical information systems such as lasers and holograms. She was a co-inventor for three optical devices, or tools. While Ellen enjoyed her work, she still had the dream of becoming an astronaut. Once again, Ellen went after her dream and applied to NASA. This time she was successful! Ellen was admitted to NASA in 1990 as a mission specialist.

7 Ellen went into space in 1993. She was the first Hispanic American to achieve this honor. Ellen went to space multiple times and spent over 1,000 hours in space.

8 In 2007, Ellen Ochoa became the deputy director of Johnson Space Center and was promoted to the director of the center in 2013. She was the director of the center until 2018. She retired in 2018 and became a member of the National Science Board. This organization works with the President of the United States to promote research and education in science and engineering. Ochoa also speaks throughout the United States informing the public about the importance of STEM education in schools.

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1. Explain how paragraph 2 relates with paragraph 5.

2. What can you infer from the following sentences in the passage?

- ☐ She excelled in high school and graduated as the valedictorian of her class.
- ☐ She worked hard in college and once again was the valedictorian of her graduating class.

3. Locate a detail in the passage that supports the following statement:

- ☐ But Ellen learned an important lesson about setting a goal and sticking to it until you achieved it.

4. What detail from the passage tells the reader that family is important to Ellen Ochoa?
